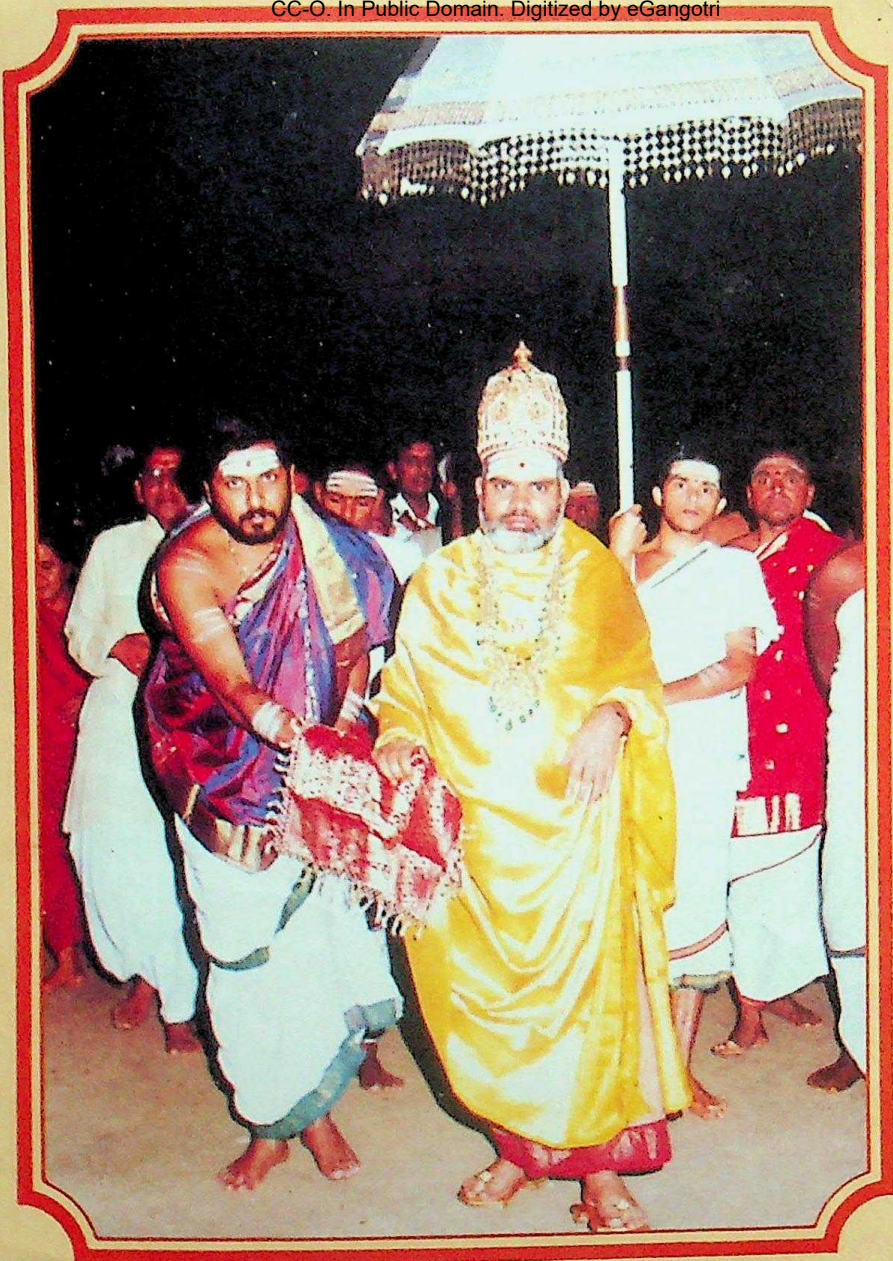


Navaratri at Sringeri

by
V. R. GOWRISHANKAR





Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri
Jagadguru Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji on the way to Sharada temple



विद्यामुद्राक्षमाला अमृतकलशकरा कोटिसूर्यप्रकाशा
जाया पद्मोद्भवस्य प्रणतजनततेः सर्वमिष्टं दिशन्ती ।
इन्द्रोपेन्द्रादिवन्द्या त्रिभुवनजननी वाक्सवित्री शरण्या
ज्ञेयं श्री शारदाम्बा सकलसुखकरी मंगलानि प्रदद्यात् ।।



Sharadamba is the consort of lotus-born Brahma, the source of speech, and refuge of all. She is the Mother of the three worlds, bestowing happiness. She dazzles like a myriad suns. Vishnu, Indra and others adore her. Holding in her hands a rosary, a jar of nectar and the mudra (symbol) of wisdom, she fulfils the wishes of all those who bow to her.

May Sharadamba confer on us all auspiciousness!



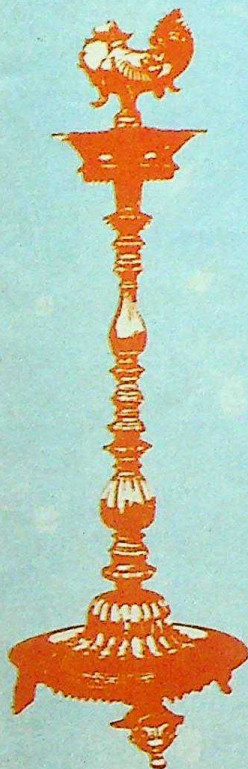
SRI VIDYA BHARATHI

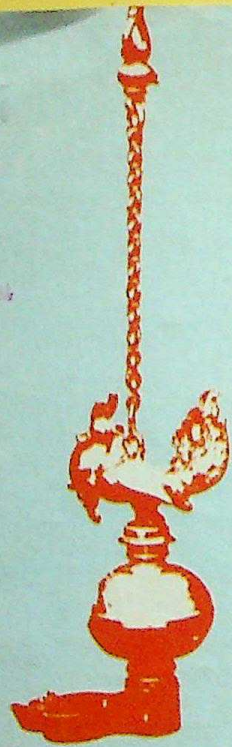
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Navaratri at Sringeri

Dating back to ancient times, this spectacular nine-day festival is a tribute to the traditions of the Sharada Peetham and its illustrious Acharyas.

Sharannavaratri is one of the most auspicious festivals when the Supreme, worshipped as Universal Mother, is adored in the form of Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasarasvati. This festival is celebrated during the bright half of *Aswayuja* (September-October) in every *Samvatsara* (year) of the traditional Hindu calendar. It marks the victory of Goddess Mahakali over the powerful *asuras* led by the demon Mahishasura.

It is believed that the Goddess fought the demon for nine days, starting from the *Pratipat* (first day of the bright half). On the tenth day of Vijaya Dasami, she killed the demon, putting an end to his reign of evil and terror. The celebration on this day symbolises the victory of righteousness over evil. Even the great warrior Arjuna set out for the battle against the Kauravas on this day after worshipping the Goddess.

Sringeri Celebrations

At Sringeri, Karnataka, the *Sharannavaratri Mahotsava* of Goddess Sharadamba, the pre-Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri

siding deity of Sri Sharada Peetham, is celebrated with all grandeur by Jagadguru Sankaracharya. Following the tradition set by sage Vidyaranya in the 14th century, the celebrations have been a continuing saga of worship to the Goddess by the succeeding Acharyas and devotees.

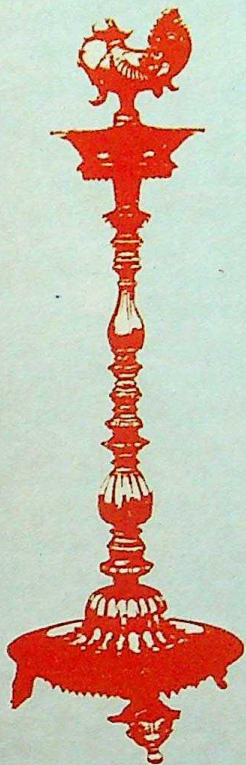
On all the ten days, the entire town of Sringeri wears a festive look. The Sri Matha entrance, the courtyard and the *gopuram* of Sri Sharada temple are brilliantly illuminated. Thousands of devotees from all over India and abroad come for the *pujas*.

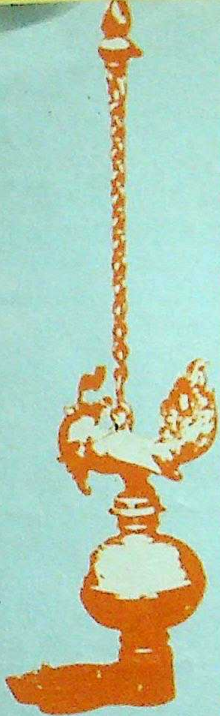
The Devi is beautifully decorated and richly adorned with precious jewels. Special ornaments used for her decoration during the festival, include a gold crown studded with diamonds, pearls and emeralds, necklaces, breast and waist plates, wristlets, armlets, and a host of other gold ornaments. Most of these ornaments are in the possession of the Matha from very early times.

Vahana Alankaras

On the *Mahalaya Amavasya* (new moon) day, Sharadamba, after the *mahabhishekam*, is adorned with *Jagat Prasutika Alankara*, signifying her unique role as Universal Mother. The commencement of the *utsava* (festival) is marked by the Sri Sharada *Pratishtha* on the day following the new moon.

From this day, the Goddess is decorated everyday on a different *vahana* (mount), identifying the same Goddess in different forms, such as the Brahmi (*Hamsa* or swan), Ma-





heshvari (bull), Kaumari (peacock), Vaishnavi (*Garuda*), Indrani (elephant), Chamundi (lion) and Ashwamahini (horse). The Goddess is also adored as Sarasvati (Veena Sharada), Mohini and Rajarajeshwari on different days.

Adi Sankara has given a full description of her resplendence in his *Sharada Bhujangam*. His Holiness Sri Sacchidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharati, the 33rd Jagadguru, in his poem *Bhakti Sudha Tarangini*, has explained the significance of each of these *vahanas*.

Jagadguru's Programme

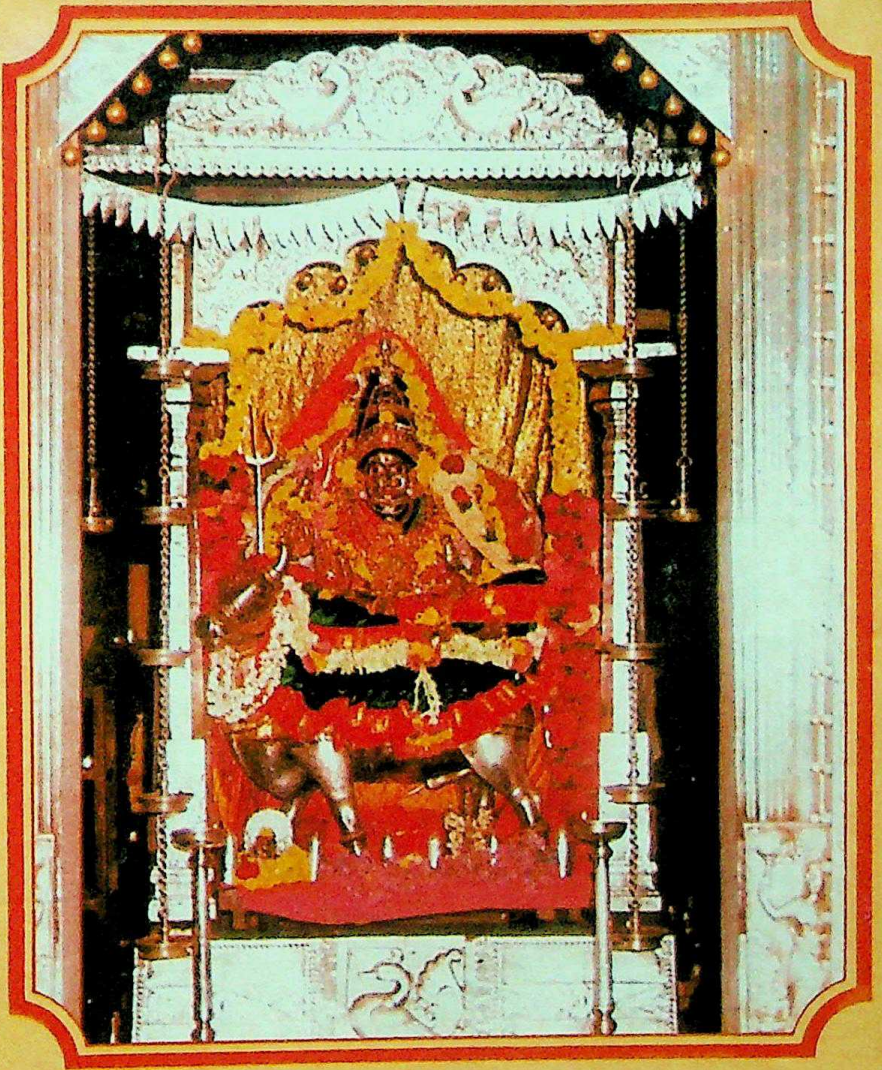
After *anushthanam* in the morning, His Holiness performs the *Ganga Puja* at the holy river Tunga and then visits all the shrines in the vicinity of the Matha.

During mid-day, he performs special *puja* to Sri Sharadamba at the *sanctum sanctorum*—an exhilarating experience for the devotees to watch. He also performs *Lalita Sahasranama Archana*, *Gaja Puja* and *Paduka Puja*.

After the regular night *puja* to Sri Chandra-moulisvara, the Jagadguru goes to Sri Sharada temple, wearing a colourful *darbar* dress and an impressive gold crown, and sits in splendour facing Sri Sharadamba.

Conceived in Moghul style, this heavy crown, studded with precious stones together with an ornamental chain in the rear, was presented by one of the former Nizams of Hyderabad as a token of his reverence for the Jagadguru.

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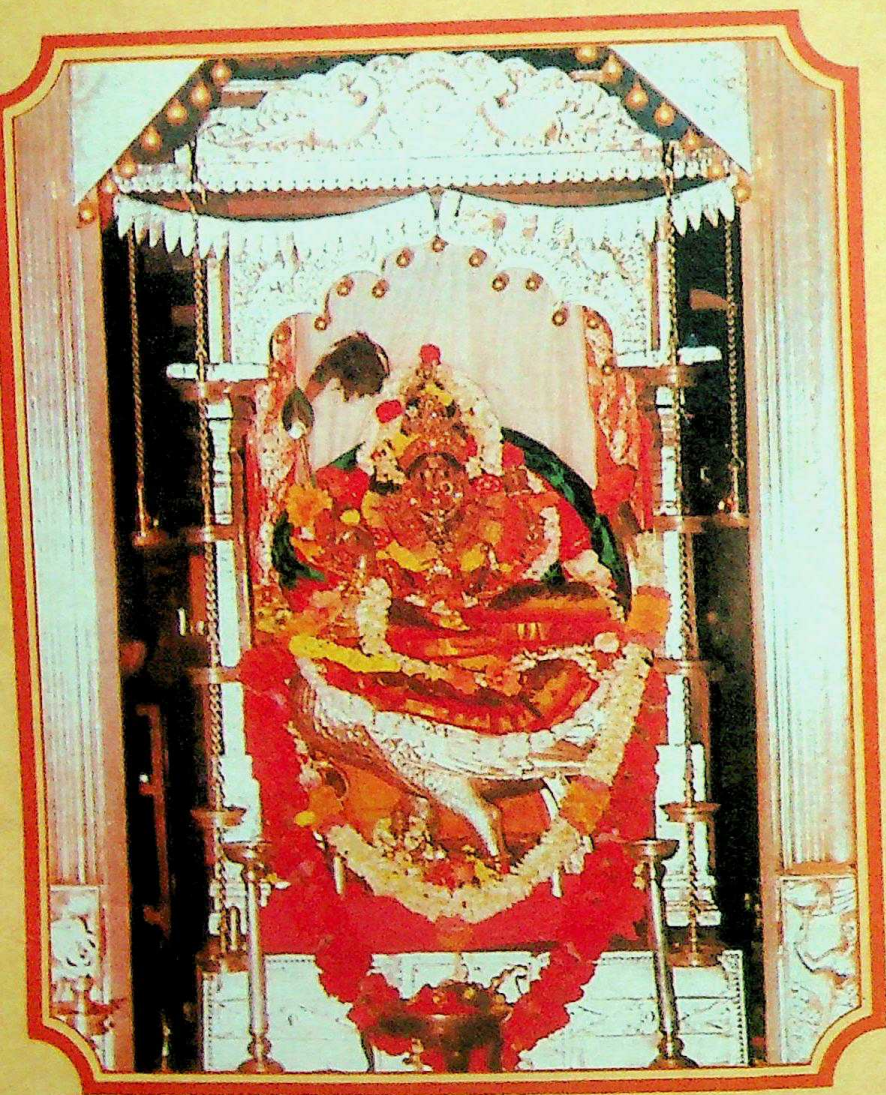


Vrushabhavahana alankara (Maheswari)

शार्दूलचर्म परिवीक्ष्य भवाङ्गसंस्थं
भीतः पलाय्य तव संनिधिमागतः किम् ।
उक्षाधिपः सरसिजासन धर्मपति
ब्रूह्यद्य संशयनिमग्नमतेर्ममाशु ॥

O Goddess, Dharmapatni of Lord
Brahma, please clear my doubt with-
out delay. Has the bull run to you
out of fear, on seeing the tiger-skin
on Lord Siva?

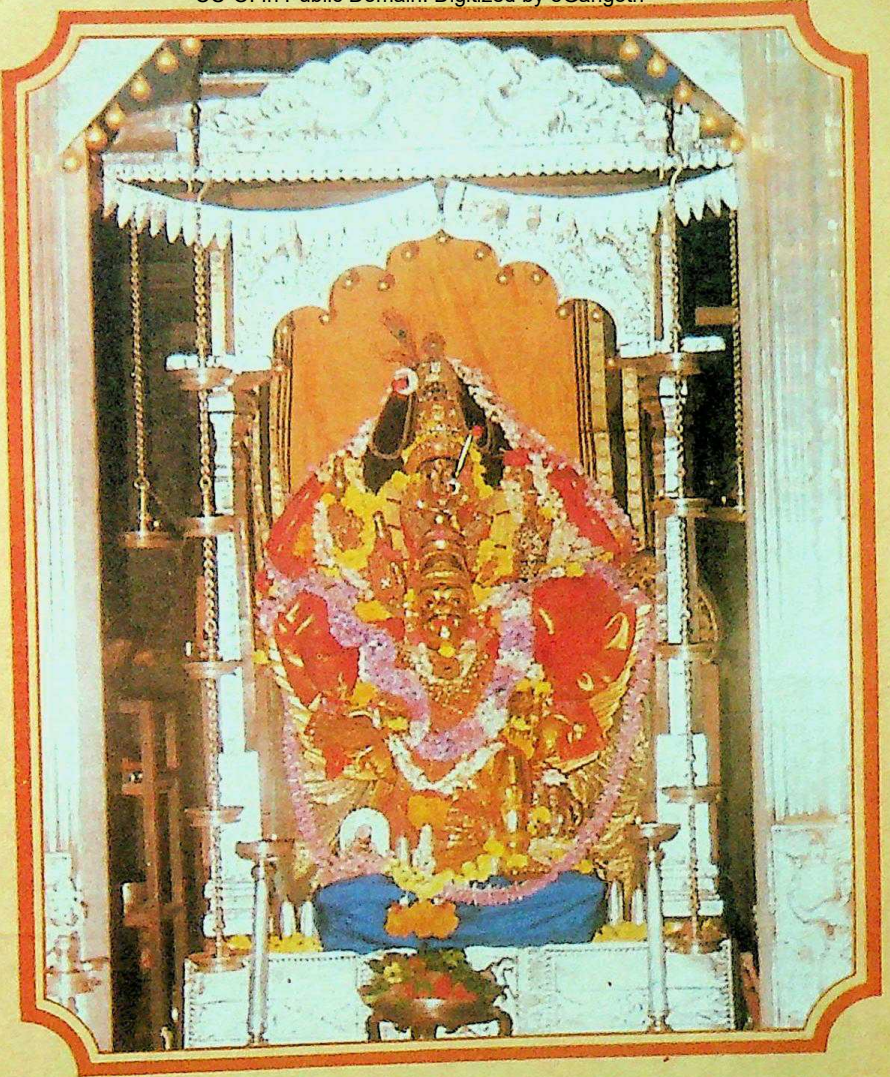
Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri
Saradamba Stotram, H. H. Sri Sacchidananda Sivaabhinava Narasimha Bharati



Mayuravahana alankara (Kaumari)

किं वर्णयामि तव सुन्दरतां मनुष्यो
यत्सुन्दरत्वमभिवीक्ष्य मयूरपक्षी ।
हित्वा विरूप इति षण्मुखमाशु मात-
वसिं करोति तव पादसरोजमूले ॥

O Goddess, how can I describe your
charm? It seems the peacock, on seeing
your indescribable beauty, decided to
reside at your lotus feet, deserting the
unattractive Shanmukha.



Garudavahana alankara (Vaishnavi)

आद्या मत्स्यमयी तनुर्मधुरिणोः कोर्म द्वितीयं वपु - O Goddess, your eyes and feet sym-
स्तद्युग्मं त्वमिहाम्य नेत्रपदयोर्व्याजेन धत्से यतः । bolise Vishnu's Matsya and Kurma
तस्माच्चक्रयुगं तवोरसि कुचव्याजेन भाल्यम्बिके । avatars. Your two breasts are like
तस्मादेव खगेश्वरश्च मृतं त्वां मेवते मोदतः ॥ his shining chakras. Therefore, Garuda
ever serves you with pleasure.

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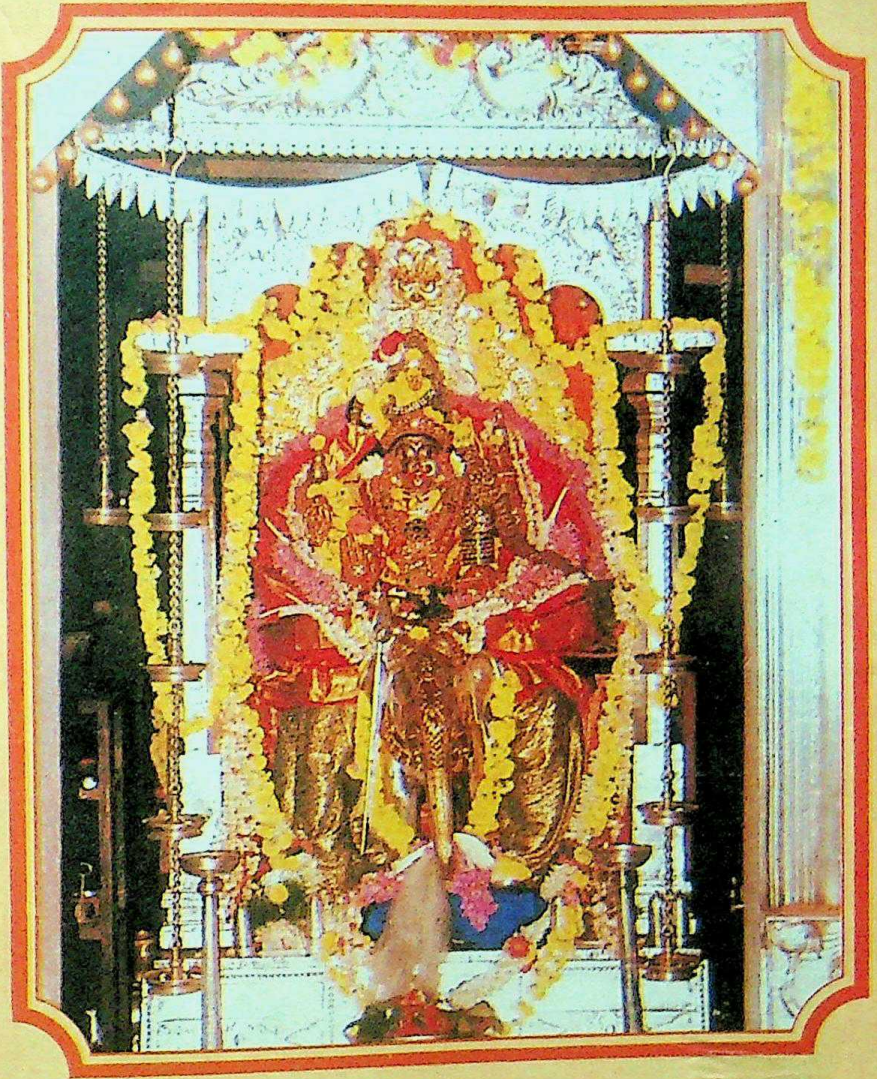
Simhavahana alankara (Chamunda)

भक्ताज्ञानमहेभा
मद्वाहनसंनिरीक्षणादेव ।
निर्योन्त्वति सहसा कि
सिंहे वाहं करोपि मातस्त्वम् ॥

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O Goddess, have you adopted the lion as your vahana, desiring that the dense darkness of ignorance of your devotees (like a huge elephant) should be dispelled on seeing your vahana?

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Indrani alankara

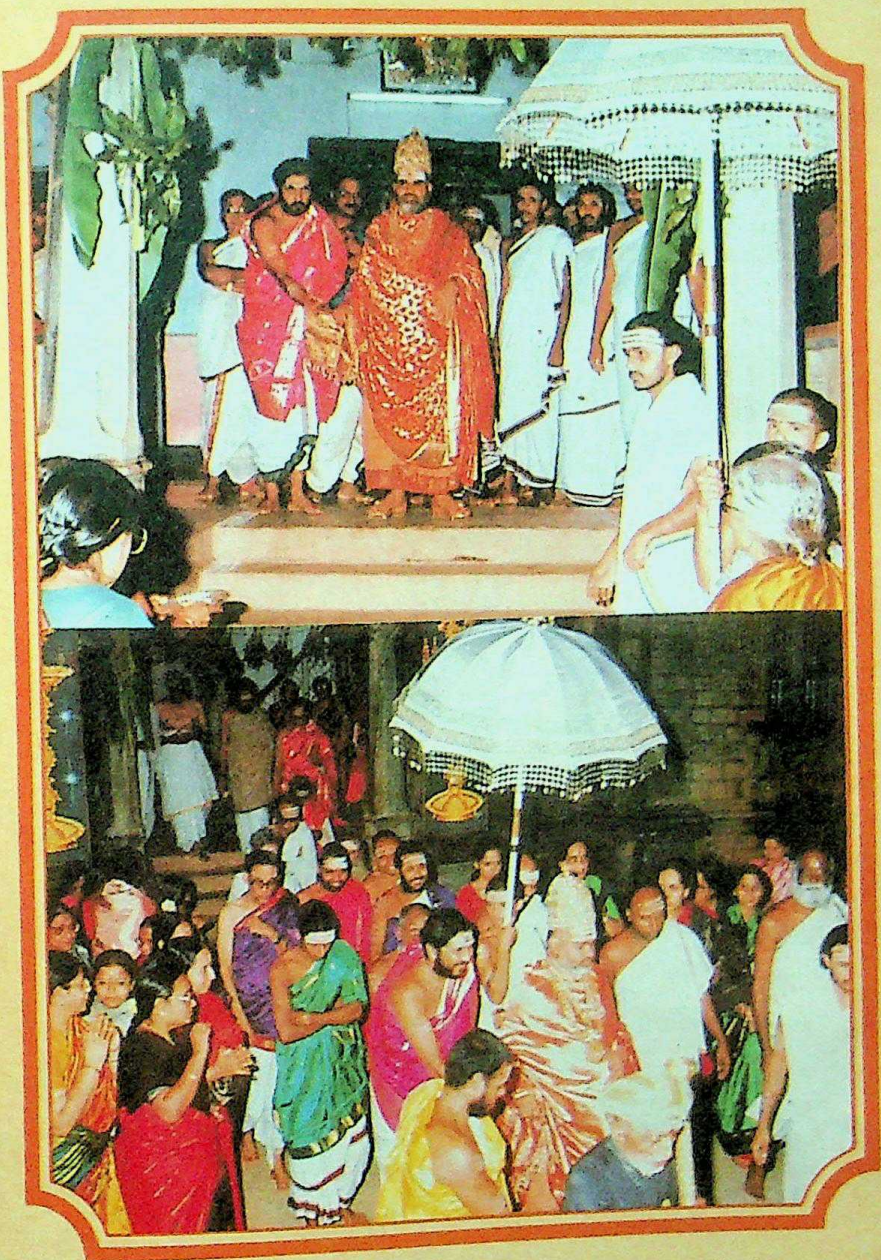
विहङ्गं कुरङ्गं तुरङ्गं च वाहं
विधायाशुगं भ्रान्तिमासाद्य किं त्वम् ।
गजं मन्दगं वाहमद्यातनोपि
प्रणम्रस्य मे ब्रूहि वाचामधीशे ॥

*O Goddess of Speech, tell me, as I am
bowing, whether you have adopted the
stately, slow-moving elephant as your
vahana, on getting tired of the fast
vahanas of Garuda, deer and horse?*



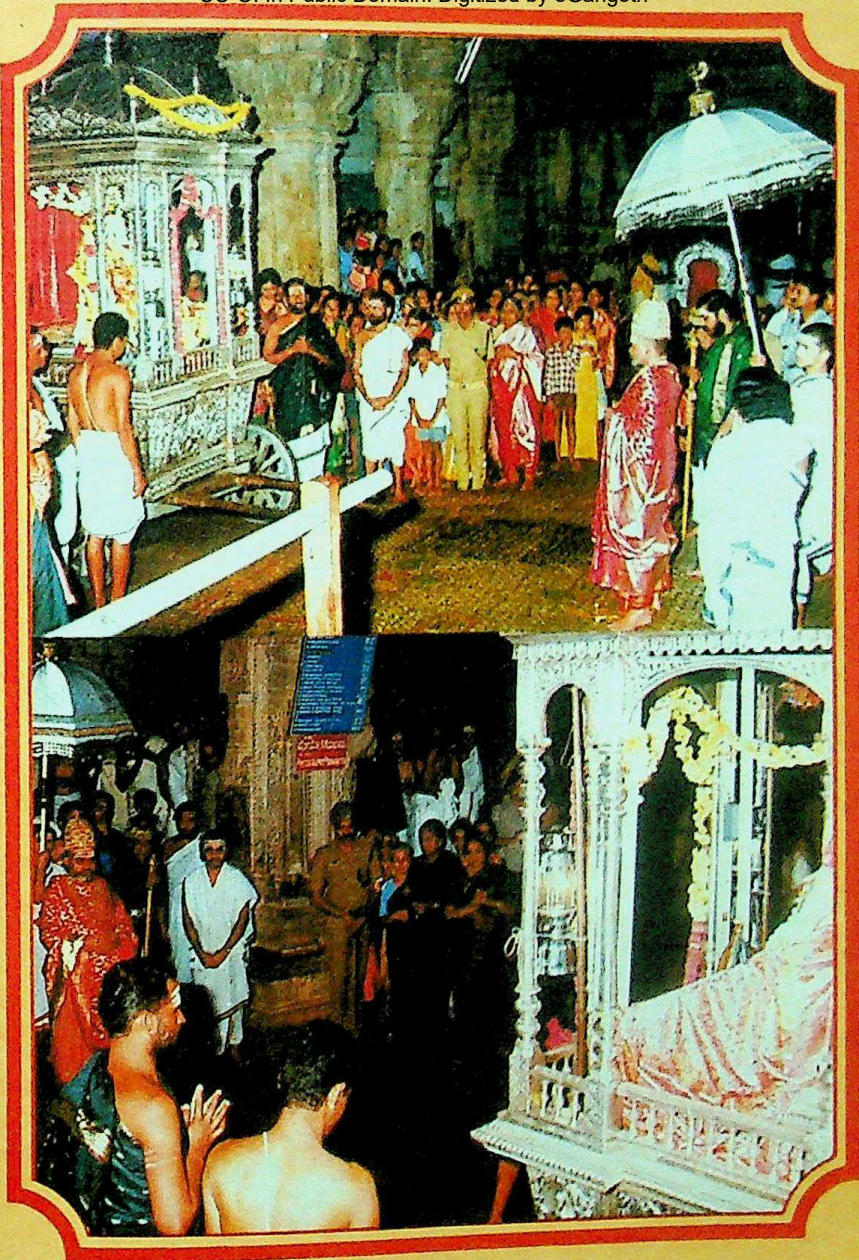


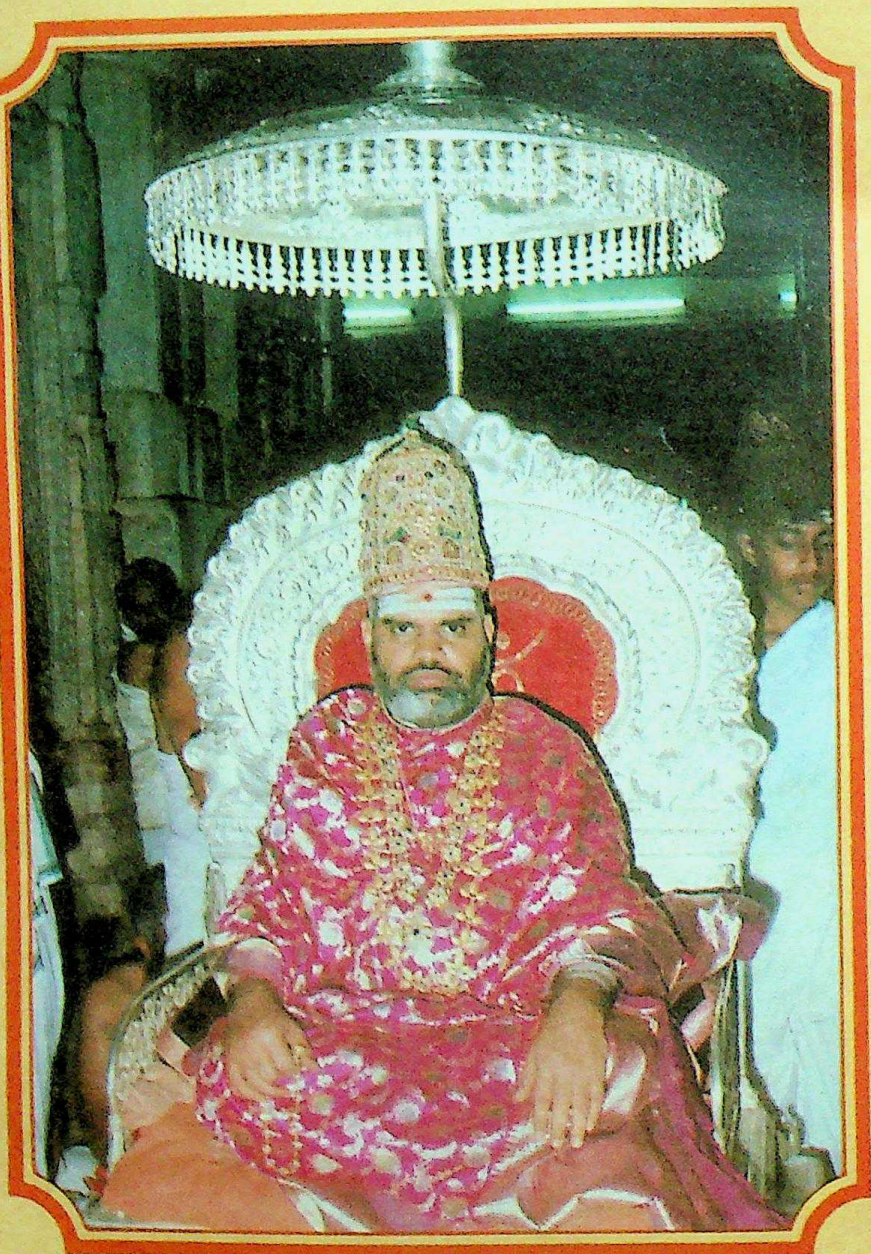


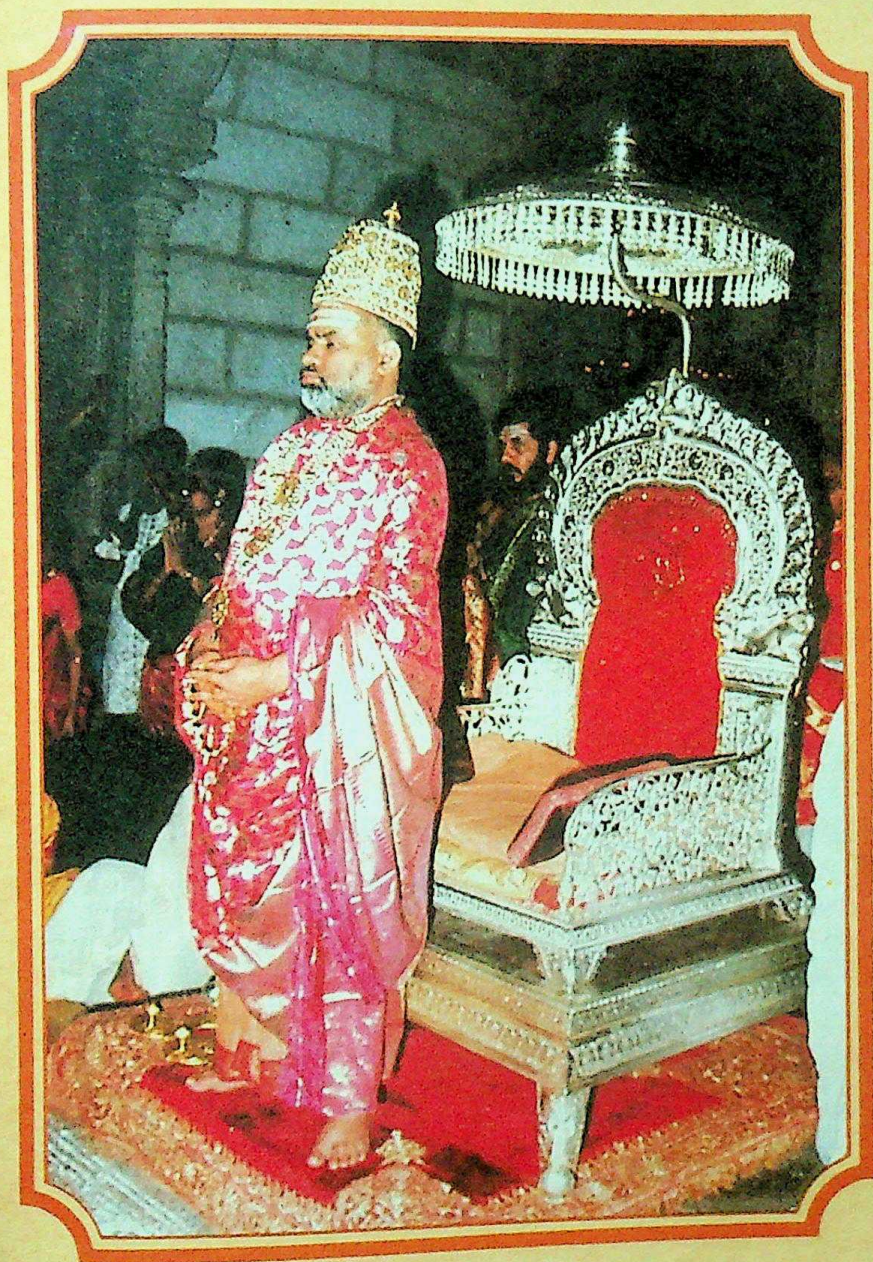


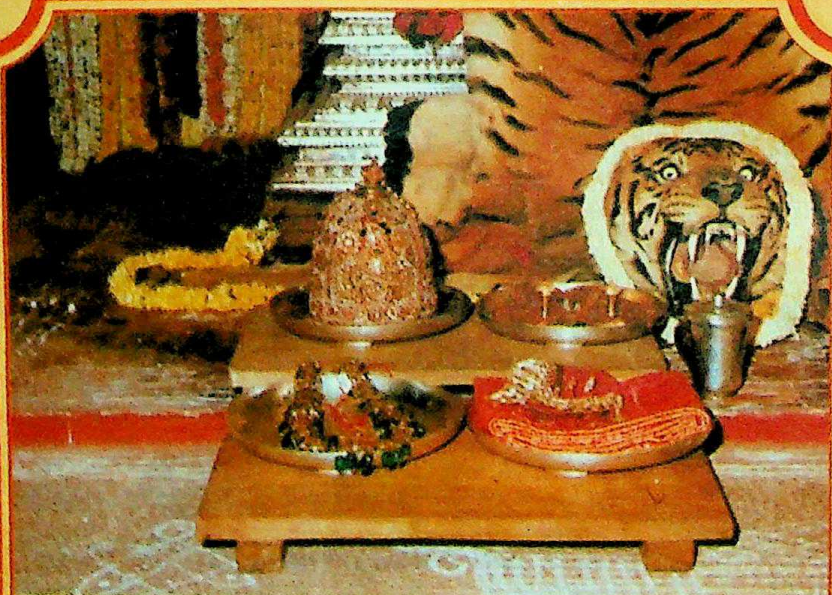
Above: ~~Pravara~~ ^{Pravara} at the house of Chandramoulisvara Toti.
Below: In procession, on the way to Sarada temple











Above: The traditional gemset crown and ornaments on display.
Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri
Below: Jagadguru taken in procession on the palanquin.

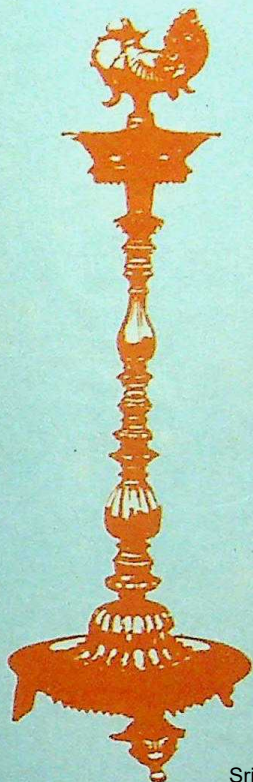
Among the precious ornaments used on this occasion, the *Muttina Sara* necklace deserves special mention. This is one of the ancient ornaments in the possession of the Matha. The pendant of gold depicts Gandaberunda, the mythical bird which, for centuries, has been ensign of the Mysore kingdom.

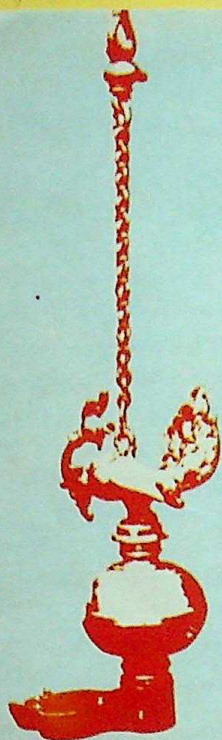
Makara Kanti (a necklace in the shape of a crocodile, made out of diamonds and emeralds) presented by Tippu Sultan to the Jagadguru, *Jamakhandi Kanti* (a necklace of diamonds) presented by the Raja of Jamakhandi, and *Katani Sara* (a seven-string necklace of pearls, diamonds and other gems) are other noteworthy jewels because of their uniqueness and antique value. It is only during the *Navaratri* festival that the entire jewels in the Matha are taken out for adoring the Goddess.

Special Pujas

On the Chaturthi (fourth day), an *ashta-dravya homa* is offered to Lord Ganapati. Starting from Panchami, the fifth day, *Saptashati Parayana* (recital) is performed with *Chandi homa*. *Purnahuti* takes place on Navami (ninth day). *Gaja Puja* and *Ayudha Puja* are also done on that day.

His Holiness recites the *Pattabhishekam* canto from the *Ramayana* on the Vijayadasami (tenth day) to mark the coronation of Sri Rama. Various *parayanas* from the *Devi Bhagavata*, *Harivamsha*, *Lalitopakhyana*, *Lakshminarayana Hridya*, *Suta Samhita*, and the *Vedas* also take place during the *Navaratri*.





Religious Significance

The Absolute Reality is Being, Consciousness, Bliss. It is formless, eternal and infinite. However, such an abstract conception may not be comprehended by most people. The Supreme Lord, therefore, out of compassion, assumes not only the forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, but also the form of Devi for the sake of devotees. The goal is to satisfy devotees of all tastes and temperaments and gradually turn their minds towards God.

The Mother is the prime cause of the universe. This conception forms the basis of the *Navaratri* festival. When a potter wants to make a pot, he first entertains a clear conception of the pot to be made. This is followed by a desire to create it and then he exerts himself to transform the idea into reality. We can find these three stages of knowledge, desire and action in every kind of activity, ranging from the simplest to the most complicated.

These three stages are present in the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe as well. The holy Mother, who is none other than pure cosmic energy, is invested with knowledge, desire and action on a cosmic scale.

When emphasis is laid on the aspect of knowledge, she is *Jnana Sakti*; when it is on her desire, she is known as *Ichha Sakti*; and when it is in respect of action, she becomes *Kriya Sakti*.

All the three are merely different aspects of one and the same divine Mother who, in essence, is beyond all these aspects.

Spiritual Evolution

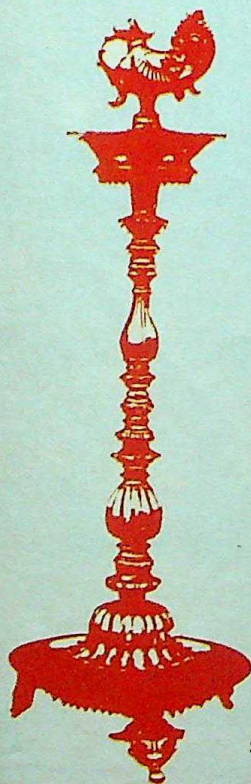
These three stages are of special significance in the seeker's spiritual evolution. On the first three days, the seeker worships Mother Durga, the Terrible, as the embodiment of supreme power and force. He prays to her to remove all his defects, impurities and vices.

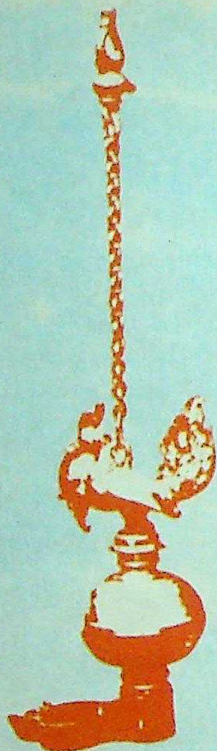
Once this is accomplished, the devotee's next task is to pray to Mother Lakshmi to bestow on him pure, divine qualities. As *Ichha Sakti*, Lakshmi is the wealth-giving aspect of God. She is the repository of pure and good qualities. It is for this reason that Lakshmi is worshipped during the next three days.

Once the evil qualities are destroyed and pure qualities developed, the aspirant becomes competent for the light of divine knowledge. In this third and last stage, the devotee must propitiate Mother Sarasvati to bestow on him supreme wisdom. Therefore, worship of Sarasvati is done on the last three days of *Navaratri*.

Sarasvati is *Jnana Sakti*, being the embodiment of knowledge of the absolute reality, or divine knowledge personified. The sound of her celestial *Vina*, awakens the notes of the sublime utterances of the Upanishads which reveal the truth and the significance of the sacred mystic sound, *Om*. She then gives complete knowledge of the Self, as represented by her pure, dazzling, snow-white appearance.

The tenth day, Vijaya Dasami, celebrates the triumphant victory, the achievement of





the goal, the unity of *Atman* with *Brahman*, through the descent of wisdom by the grace of *Sarasvati*.

The spiritual journey is now complete. The soul rests in its own Supreme Self as *Sachidananda Brahman*.

Mother's Grace

Devotees deem it a privilege to offer special *seva* (worship) to the Goddess during the *Navaratri*. They come to Sringeri in thousands to worship her during these days. Goddess Sharada's grace is boundless; her mercy unlimited; her knowledge infinite; her power immeasurable; her glory ineffable and her splendour indescribable.

May we pray that every devotee worshipping the Universal Mother according to tradition will become free from sins and sorrows, that his ignorance will vanish, and that he will gain not only supreme happiness but also liberation in the end from the ocean of *samsara*.

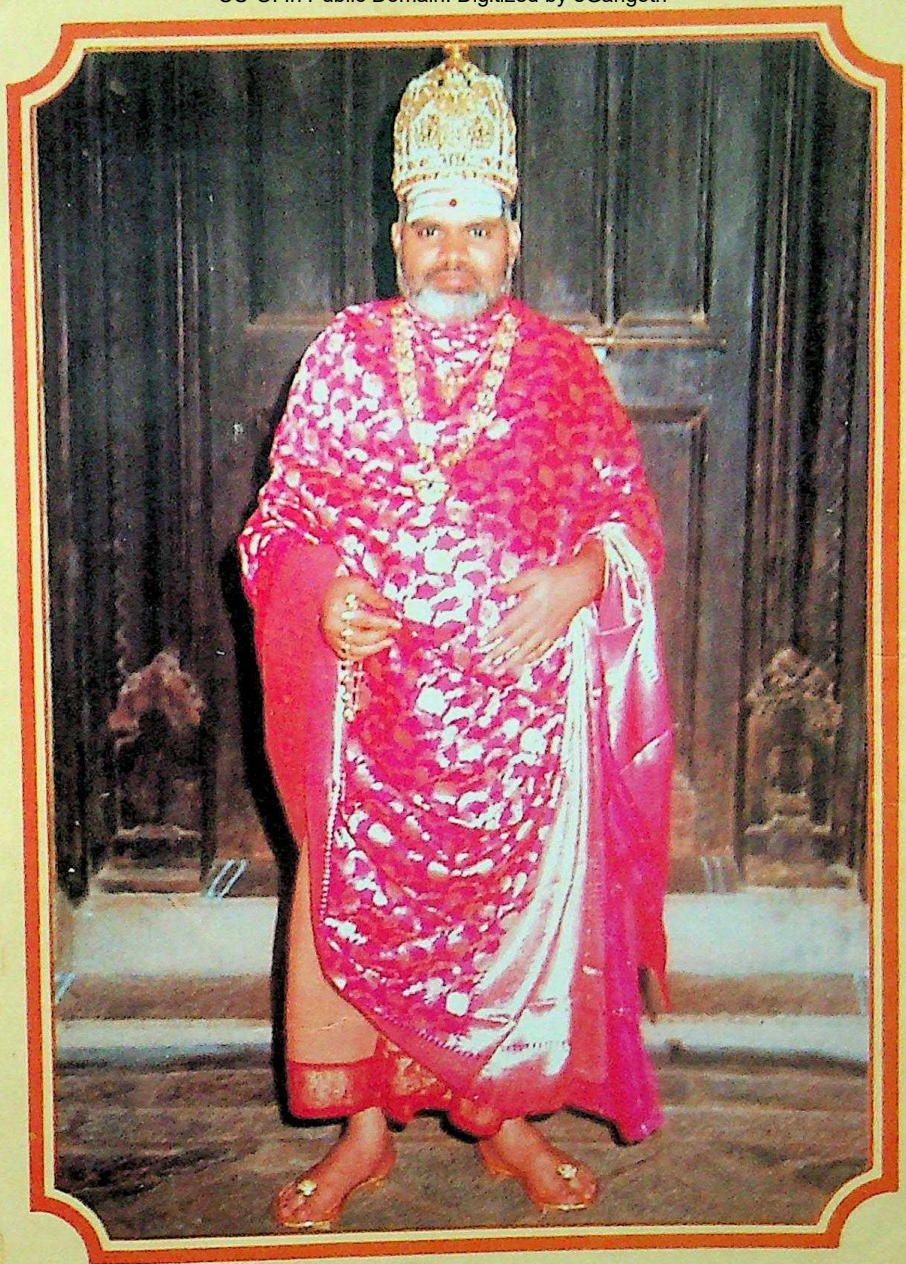
V. R. Gowrishankar is the Administrator of Sri Sringeri Matha and its properties, Sringeri 577 139, Karnataka.

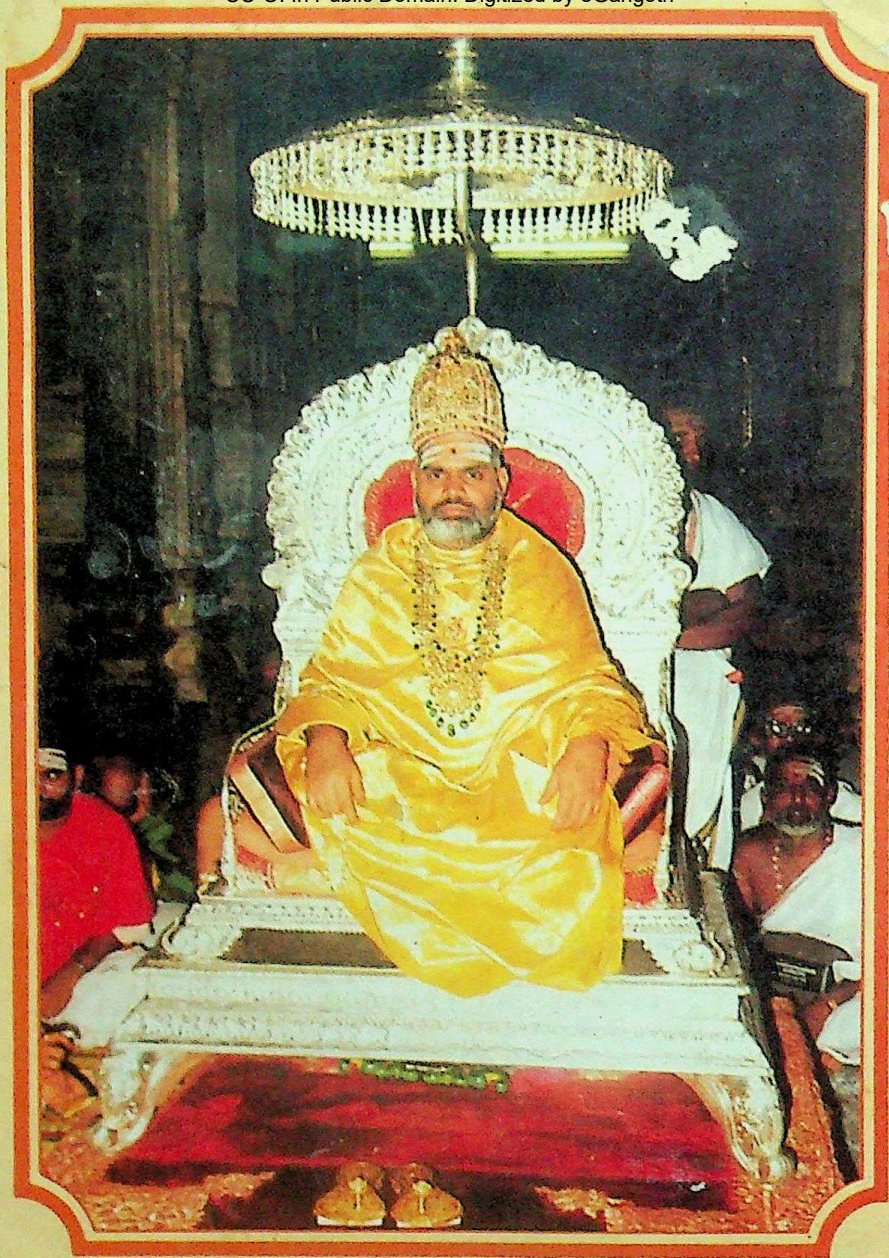
Courtesy

SONI LADHIBEN VALJIBHAI LODHIA CHARITABLE TRUST, RAJKOT,
PUJYA LADHIMA'S DEVOTEE LATE SHRI J. B. BODA
AND ALL HIS FAMILY MEMBERS

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